



Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

A Complete Catechesis for Christian Living

Doctrinal Catechesis Session
Mary Birmingham

Sacrament of Reconciliation



Prodigal Son: Rembrandt, Public domain



Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us,
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil. Amen.



Note to the Catechist

There may be more material than you can use in a one-hour session. Select and arrange accordingly. Use questions and material that is best suited for your particular group.



Read the connecting statement

to draw the line between this week's liturgy and this chosen doctrinal theme.

This connecting statement is found in the *Breaking Open the Word* worksheet for this week.

Catholic Faith, Life & Creed Version 2.0

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Version 2.0 reflects all recent revisions in
the Roman Missal.

NIHIL OBSTAT
Rev. Steven Olds
Censor Liborum

IMPRIMATUR
† Most Rev. John Noonan
Bishop of Orlando

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Editors: Bill Huebsch, Diana
Macalintal, & Nick Wagner

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Sharing Human Experience

Catechist leads participants in a small group sharing exercise. Break into small groups (three or four). Remind participants to make time for all in the group to respond.

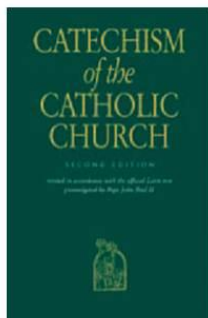
Catechist begins the discussion by sharing an experience from his or her life. See Appendix #1.

- ▶ Have you ever been forgiven by someone?
- ▶ Have you ever had to forgive?
- ▶ Has forgiveness ever been withheld?
- ▶ In light of your experience, what would you say about forgiveness?

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions.

- ▶ Can you think of a time in our world when someone forgave another and it made the news?
- ▶ What about when forgiveness was not extended?
- ▶ What does that say to us about how the world views forgiveness?

Catechist uses their responses to launch into a discussion about sacrament of reconciliation.



Sharing Catholic Doctrine

Drawn from the Catechism of the Catholic Church

Refer to articles 1434-1470.

Catechist continues:

- ▶ Before considering the sacrament of reconciliation in particular, it is important to examine what the Church teaches about reconciliation in general.
- ▶ The Church teaches that the primary way we are reconciled to God is through our weekly celebration of the Eucharist.

- ▶ The eucharistic liturgy, or the Mass, teaches us about reconciliation in the ritual prayers, gestures, symbols, and actions we pray.
- ▶ Liturgy forms us in the faith. When we use sacred symbols and proclaim God's word, when we make ritual gestures and pray the ritual prayers, we also express the primary beliefs and tenets of our faith.
- ▶ The Eucharistic Prayer is a primary ritual prayer of the Mass. This prayer teaches us what the Church believes about reconciliation.

What is reconciliation?

Catechist leads participants in the following exercise.

1. Make a copy of EUCHARISTIC PRAYER FOR MASSES OF RECONCILIATION I in the Roman Missal.
 2. Invite the group to underline everything in the Eucharistic Prayer that refers to or speaks about reconciliation.
 3. Following that exercise, break into small groups and summarize what the Church teaches and believes about reconciliation.
 4. What does the prayer say about God's role? What does the prayer say about our role?
 5. End this segment by bringing the conversation to the wider group. Draw some conclusions about reconciliation from their responses.
- ▶ What does the Church teach and believe about reconciliation?
 - ▶ What does the prayer say about God's role?
 - ▶ What does the prayer say about our role?

Note to catechist: reflection questions are provided after every segment in order to give participants the opportunity to thoroughly engage each section. If time is a consideration, choose which questions to include and which to omit.

Summary points:

- ▶ God always invites us to be reconciled to him and others.
- ▶ God wants to forgive us.
- ▶ We are to trust that God will forgive us.
- ▶ Regardless of how often we have turned away from God, God does not abandon us.
- ▶ God's commitment to the human family will never end.
- ▶ God loves us more than ever when we are lost and have turned away from him.
- ▶ Jesus reconciled us by the blood of the cross.
- ▶ He shed his blood so that sins may be forgiven.
- ▶ Sins are forgiven through the sacrifice that is re-presented in our midst in the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist.

How Do We Ritualize the Reconciliation Jesus Offers Us?

In two ways

1. the sacrament of the Eucharist
2. the sacrament of reconciliation

Catechist presents these key points on reconciliation:

- ▶ Jesus' entire earthly ministry was one of healing and reconciliation.
- ▶ He exhorted all people to repent.
- ▶ The sacrament of reconciliation celebrates, helps us notice in a particular way, the reconciliation Christ won for us on the cross.
- ▶ Jesus reconciled us to God through his sacrifice. Yet still we continue to sin.
- ▶ Important: The focus of this sacrament, however, is not our sinfulness.
- ▶ While we must acknowledge that we are sinners, the focus of the sacrament of penance is God's awesome mercy through Christ.

God Calls Us to be Reconciled with God and with the Church.

- ▶ The Rite of Penance reminds us that when we sin, we harm our relationship with God.
- ▶ When sinners repent, they run into the arms of the merciful Father who knows them best and loves them most, and who offers unconditional love. They are embraced by the God who shows unparalleled compassion for his children. He goes in search of the lost and makes every effort to bring them home into the fold of his loving embrace.
- ▶ God's love unites us with the people of God.
- ▶ The Rite of Penance reminds us that the sin of one person impacts others. The sin of one does not just harm the sinner, it harms others as well.

Catechist shares an example of this from his or her life. See appendix #2. Catechist invites participants to break into small groups and respond to the following questions.

- ▶ Have you ever had an experience in your life in which your behavior negatively influenced not only you, but others as well?
- ▶ Have you ever had an experience in which your example positively influenced others?

Catechist continues:

- ▶ The good news is that if the sin of one harms others, similarly, the holiness of one benefits others.
- ▶ The good we do influences others. Our good example makes a difference. The sacrament of reconciliation strengthens us to live a life of holiness that we are all called to live.
- ▶ The Rite of Penance reminds us that penance always includes reconciliation with our brothers and sisters who are harmed by our sins (cf. Rite of Penance #5).
- ▶ We are strengthened through this sacrament to be agents of peace and justice in a world ravaged by sin and oppression.
- ▶ Yet, the Rite also reminds us that people frequently come together to participate in injustice (cf. RP, #5).
- ▶ The Rite of Penance reminds us that it is not just our personal sins, but our participation in the social dimension of sin that we must examine and bring before God.
- ▶ "Sin and its effects are visible everywhere: in exploitive relationships, loveless

families, unjust social structures and policies, crimes by and against individuals and against creation, the oppression of the weak and the manipulation of the vulnerable, explosive tensions among nations and among ideological, racial and religious groups, and social classes, the scandalous gulf between those who waste goods and resources, and those who live and die amid depravation and underdevelopment, wars and preparation for war. Sin is a reality in the world” (National Catechetical Directory, #98).

- ▶ The Rite of Penance reminds us that we should help one another do penance by working with others to realize justice and peace in the world.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following question in the wider group.

- ▶ What are some ways that we participate in the social dimension of sin in our world?

The Effects of Reconciliation

- ▶ Reconciliation with God anticipates and includes complete *metanoia*, conversion of the entire self, conversion of mind and heart to God.
- ▶ Once converted, the penitent can do no less than be genuinely sorry for his or her sins and truly commit to amend his or her life. True conversion ultimately leads to transformation. Once penitents are truly sorry for sin and long for authentic transformation they:
 - Confess their sins to the Church’s minister.
 - Make satisfaction for those same sins.
 - Commit to go and sin no more. They commit to change their lives.
- ▶ In so doing and by the power of the Holy Spirit given to the Church, such penitents are forgiven.
- ▶ The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reminds us that reconciliation with God causes a “spiritual resurrection.”
- ▶ We are restored to the state that was intended for us at the creation of the world. We are in complete harmony with God and free from sin, until such time that we once again fall prey to its trap (CCC, 1468).
- ▶ God grants pardon to the sinner through the sacramental sign of absolution.
- ▶ As stated, the primary sacramental sign associated with the sacrament of reconciliation is the laying on of hands. Why hands? In what way does the sign of laying on of hands reveal what is signified in the sacrament?

Catechist engages the participants in a reflection on the role of “hands” in the sacrament of reconciliation.

- ▶ What is it about hands in everyday life that might communicate God’s presence?
- ▶ What do our hands express? How do they communicate? What do they communicate?

Participants respond accordingly with responses such as: they communicate (how do they communicate, what do they communicate?), hands express love, they express forgiveness.

- ▶ How did Jesus use hands in his ministry?

Elicit responses such as: he touched people, he placed spittle and mud on the eyes of the blind, he laid on hands, and so forth.

- ▶ Why then do you imagine hands express the presence and sign of Christ's mercy in the sacrament of reconciliation? What do hands communicate in this sacrament?

Catechist summarizes their responses and connects them with the remaining material.

Catechist continues:

Four Elements of the Rite of Penance

1. Contrition
2. Confession
3. Penance
4. Absolution

Contrition

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following question.

- ▶ What does the work “contrition” mean to you?

Catechist continues:

- ▶ As stated earlier, the sacrament of reconciliation celebrates what God has already accomplished through the sacrifice of his Son, Jesus Christ.
- ▶ Contrition is deep sorrow for sin and the intention to avoid sin in the future.
- ▶ Contrition is true sorrow for sin and hatred for the sin committed, together with the firm resolve not to sin again (cf. CCC, 1451).
- ▶ True contrition involves the complete conversion of heart.
- ▶ The sinner commits to changing his or her life and living in the shadow of Christ. With the help of God, he or she strives to grow in holiness.
- ▶ In the interest of true conversion, the sinner examines his or her conscience in order to uncover the areas of sin still in need of God's healing, liberating mercy, and forgiveness.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions silently, in their journal, or with one other person.

- ✓ Option 1: Respond to the following questions in your journal.
- ✓ Option 2: Small group reflection: share with one or two others what you are comfortable sharing.
- ✓ Option 3: Reflect in silence.
- ▶ Have you ever experienced a time when you had deep sorrow for your actions, thoughts or behaviors?
- ▶ Have you ever experienced a time when your sinful patterns in life got in the way of your relationship with God or your loved ones?
- ▶ Have you ever experienced a time when it was difficult for you to respond to God's invitation to get closer to him because of your sinful behaviors?
- ▶ Looking back, what was God trying to teach you?

Catechist shares an experience from his or her life: See Appendix #3 for an example. Catechist invites participants to respond to share insights gleaned in the small group sharing and share with the wider group.

- ▶ What was God trying to teach you in the experience you shared?

Two Forms of Contrition

1. Perfect contrition
2. Imperfect contrition

(Refer to CCC #1451-1453).

Perfect contrition

- ▶ Perfect contrition simply flows from our love relationship with God, our absolute love of God.
- ▶ We are sorry for our sins because we love God so much and we know that our sins offend God and keep us from perfect intimacy with him.
- ▶ When we have perfect sorrow for our sins because of our love for God, our minor (venial) sins are automatically forgiven. Our grave mortal sins are forgiven as long as we promise to avail ourselves of the sacrament as soon as we are able.

Imperfect contrition

- ▶ Imperfect contrition is simply sorrow for sin because we hate the ugliness of sin or because we fear eternal damnation.
- ▶ Such contrition, while not perfect, is nevertheless a potential catalyst to bring us to the sacrament.
- ▶ Imperfect contrition does not have the power in and of itself to forgive serious sin.

Confession

- ▶ The sinner is called to examine his or her life before God.
- ▶ The sinner is exhorted to consider the areas and habits of sin in his or her life.
- ▶ The sinner is invited by God to enter into deep conversion and sorrow for sin.
- ▶ The sinner then is invited to name his or her sins.
- ▶ The sinner confesses them to God's minister who has been given the power to forgive sins by the Holy Spirit (RP: # 6b).
- ▶ Only God forgives sins; Jesus was given authority on earth to forgive sins, and he gave that authority to the apostles and exhorted them to exercise it.
- ▶ The authority to forgive sins in Jesus' name continues through the unbroken line of the apostles, through the ministers of the Church, the ordained priesthood.
- ▶ When sins are confessed, hearts are opened to God's minister who has taken a sacred oath not to reveal anything that is spoken when confession is made. What is said is between the confessor and the sinner is bound by the seal of confession. The priest may never divulge the content of sacramental confession. To break the seal of confession is to commit the gravest of sins.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions, first in a small group and then share insights with the larger group.

- ▶ Have you ever experienced the naming of a fault or a sin either in the sacrament of reconciliation or to another person? What was the result? How did it make you feel?
- ▶ What is the wisdom underlying the naming of one's sins to another person?
- ▶ Why is it good to not only confess your sins directly to God in your heart, but also to name them and confess them to the Church's minister, the priest?

Act of Penance

- ▶ Our response to God's incredible mercy is to perform an action that demonstrates our willingness to change, our commitment to avoid the same sins that we seem to commit over and over again: the habit of sin.
- ▶ When we sin, our actions harm our neighbor (CCC, 1459) and we must do what we can to restore the relationship and repair the harm.
- ▶ Sin harms our spiritual life. The act of penance is medicinal; it helps to heal our sin-sick soul. While we are forgiven through the sacramental sign of absolution, the disorder that causes sin is not automatically healed.
- ▶ Serious sin harms our spiritual health. We make satisfaction or penance in order to strengthen us not to sin again. The act of penance strengthens us and helps restore us to spiritual health.
- ▶ In the act of penance, the sinner affirms that Christ already made satisfaction for the sin of humanity by his sacrificial death on the cross. Sinners cooperate with the satisfaction already accomplished by making their own satisfaction.
- ▶ Sinners promise not to sin again. The sinner affirms that his or her actions speak louder than words by performing an act of penance.
- ▶ This act of penance may be accomplished in a variety of ways.
 - The priest might suggest that the penitent pray certain prayers, meditate on the cross of Christ, read sacred Scripture, or perform a spiritual or corporal work of mercy.
 - The priest might suggest that wrongs be righted and that harm done to another be rectified to the best of the sinner's ability.
- ▶ The Rite of Penance insists that sinners live ongoing lives of penance when they serve their neighbor and patiently accept the joys, sorrows, and crosses of everyday life; when they read the Scriptures and help the poor; when they perform the disciplines of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.
- ▶ In summary, penance is accomplished when the sinner makes satisfaction for sins committed, when he or she promises to amend his or her conduct, and make reparation for injury.
- ▶ We can do nothing to earn God's forgiveness. It is freely given. However, we can show God that we are serious about our intention to change our lives. Satisfaction is the means by which we commit to amend our behavior.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in the larger group.

- ▶ Consider the various sins human beings commit. Then imagine what might be a sufficient penance to make reparation for the sins you named.
- ▶ Why is the act of penance an important element in the sacrament of reconciliation?

Absolution

- ▶ God grants pardon to the sinner through the sacramental sign of absolution.
- ▶ Through the sacramental symbol of laying on of hands, the priest confers God's forgiveness. The Holy Spirit is invoked through the sacramental sign of extended hands and through that "epicletic" action (an epicletic action is an action that invokes the Holy Spirit), the sinner is forgiven.
- ▶ The transformative power of the Holy Spirit invites deep conversion of heart and

strengthens the sinner to avoid sin in the future.

- ▶ Through absolution the sinner is not only reconciled with God, but also with the Church.
- ▶ In the story of the Prodigal Son, the father not only welcomed his son home and restored him to full stature; he also reconciled him with the community.
- ▶ Through sacramental absolution, the sinner is clothed with the reconciling robe of mercy and restored to full stature as a child of God and a member of the people of God.

Frequently Asked Questions

How often must one celebrate this sacrament?

- ▶ Catholics are required to celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation only if they have mortal sins to confess.
- ▶ The Church requires Catholics to celebrate the sacrament at least once a year.
- ▶ However, since this sacrament is more about God's incredible mercy than it is about sin, why would we not avail ourselves of this incredible gift of compassion and forgiveness as often as possible?
- ▶ A good practice would be to celebrate the sacrament monthly, thus strengthening the penitent to avoid the habit of sin and its effects.

When do catechumens and candidates celebrate this sacrament?

- ▶ The sacrament of reconciliation was established in response to the fact that even after baptism people continued to sin.
- ▶ The sacrament of baptism did not "abolish the frailty of human nature" (CCC 1426), and structures were needed to address post-baptismal sins.
- ▶ The question arose: "How are sins committed after baptism forgiven?" The sacrament of reconciliation evolved in response to that question. Thus, Jesus' ministry of healing and reconciliation has continued through the centuries through the sacrament of reconciliation.
- ▶ Baptism, however, remains the first encounter of God's sacramental reconciliation and forgiveness. Through the waters of death and resurrection, the newly baptized die to sin and are reborn to new life in Christ.
- ▶ Baptism is the first sacrament and must be celebrated before all others. Therefore the Church instructs catechists to prepare catechumens for the sacrament of reconciliation so that once initiated, they can benefit from this ongoing fountain of reconciling grace.
- ▶ Baptized candidates are similarly prepared and then are invited to celebrate the sacrament, particularly as proximate preparation for full communion in the Catholic Church.

How do I participate in this sacrament? How do I celebrate the sacrament?

- ▶ Penitents generally will experience one of two forms of this sacrament. The preferred form is a communal form in which the community gathers for a liturgy of the word, an examination of conscience and prayers of reconciliation, and then everyone is dismissed for individual confession and absolution.
- ▶ The other form is the individual form in which the penitent enters a reconciliation room at a prescribed scheduled time; either faces the priest directly or anonymously behind a screen. The priest prays a brief liturgy of the word; the penitent confesses his or her sins, and the priest confers absolution.

Review

Catechist invites participants to review some of the elements of the sacrament of reconciliation. What did you learn about the sacrament of reconciliation?

- ▶ What are some of the elements of this sacrament?
- ▶ Who is the minister of this sacrament?
- ▶ Who offers forgiveness?
- ▶ How is forgiveness offered?
- ▶ What is the primary symbol associated with this rite of the Church?
- ▶ What does the primary symbol express?
- ▶ What does it mean?
- ▶ If you were to name the most important effect of this sacrament, what would that be?
- ▶ What is the good news about this sacrament?
- ▶ Is there something that makes you uneasy about this sacrament?
- ▶ Do you have any unanswered questions about this sacrament?



Community Connections

Catechist invites participants to relate what was shared today to an experience in their lives. Catechist shares an experience from his or life and invites others to do the same.

Liturgy, Scripture, and doctrine challenge us to transform our lives so that we can go out and help transform the world.

Catechist informs the group of any parish activity taking place and makes arrangements for group participation.

The implications of the sacrament of reconciliation are that we are to work for peace and justice in the world. What is taking place in the community this week that promotes the cause of peace and justice?

For example, “This week our parish is supporting the new shelter for homeless women and children. Our parish is providing the financial and humanitarian help. The center needs help with renovations but also with clients who need the help of people with skill and expertise in working with such situations. Let us meet at the shelter this Monday evening.”



Mystagogy & your decision for change

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following challenge by sharing with one other person. Share only what you are comfortable sharing. This is not a reconciliation room.

- ▶ What are the implications of the Church's teaching on the sacrament of reconciliation?
- ▶ How does this teaching and the gospel we shared today invite you to be a better disciple?
- ▶ In what way is God calling you to be an agent of reconciliation in your world this week? Who in your life needs you to reach out and extend the olive branch of forgiveness?
- ▶ What is your greatest need for healing and reconciliation?
- ▶ Are there any issues of unresolved animosities, jealousies, resentments, hurts, or painful memories in need of God's reconciling mercy?

Journal

Spend this week reflecting on the many points made in this session. Write about your response to them.



Closing Prayer

Option 1:

Penitential celebration

The Church provides a penitential celebration for use with catechumens and others that serves as prayerful, liturgical preparation for the sacrament of reconciliation. End this session by celebrating a penitential celebration found in the Rite of Penance Appendix II.

The Church suggests this non-sacramental penitential celebration be used with catechumens and people who are preparing for celebration of this sacrament. A lay person is free to preside at this celebration.

Option 2:

If this is a catechumenal session, end the session with a minor exorcism. See RCIA #90-94.

Option 3:

Catechist invites the participants to pray the Act of Contrition everyday and for those who do not have a similar prayer memorized, to begin the process of memorizing this prayer.

ACT OF CONTRITION

My God, I am sorry for my sins with all my heart.

In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good,

I have sinned against you whom I should love above all things.

I firmly intend, with your help, to do penance,

to sin no more, and to avoid whatever leads me to sin.

Our Savior Jesus Christ suffered and died for us.

In his name, my God, have mercy.

Appendix

#1. Many years ago, I said something terrible to a person very close to me. As soon as I said the words, I was sorry I said them, and I knew I could not take them back. I knew I had ruptured our relationship. I apologized, and I asked for forgiveness. But the relationship was never the same from that day forward. I learned that forgiveness is a gift not to be taken lightly. I also learned how thankful I am that God so freely offers forgiveness, since it is sometimes a very difficult thing for human beings to do.

#2. I came to realize that I was consistently treating a significant relationship in my life in less than loving ways. Once my eyes were opened to this less-than-loving behavior, I had to name it, reach out to the person I offended, and ask for forgiveness. Once my eyes were opened to this habit of sin, I was able to recognize similar behaviors in people close to me who had been influenced by my behavior. I was compelled not only to reach out to the original person I offended, but also to ask forgiveness of those who had been influenced by my bad example. My sin not only affected just the one person; it affected others who experienced this habit of sin in me and repeated it in their lives.

#3. Many years ago, I was involved in a scandalous division in a parish community. I felt very righteous about my position. I felt I was on the side of God. I thus felt justified to engage in gossip about those with who I was in disagreement. Every time I engaged in this behavior, I could hear my conscience tugging at my heart. The call to forgiveness was deafening, but I remained deaf in the face of it. I found it difficult to pray or to hear God speaking during this chaotic time. My focus was on the division and my pride-filled response to it, not on God. God was trying very hard to reach me, and I remained deaf to his entreaty. Once my eyes were opened and I was willing to let go of my favored positions, I was able to open to God's forgiveness and I was truly sorry for my behavior.

Handout on the Sacrament of Reconciliation

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 2. the sacrament of reconciliation
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 - ▶ Important: The focus of this sacrament, however, is not our sinfulness.
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2. Confession
3. Penance
4. Absolution

Contrition

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Two Forms of Contrition

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2. Imperfect contrition

(Refer to CCC #1451-1453).

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- ▶ We are sorry for our sins because we love God so much and we know that our sins offend God and keep us from perfect intimacy with him.
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Imperfect contrition

- ▶ Imperfect contrition is simply sorrow for sin because we hate the ugliness of sin or because we fear eternal damnation.
- ▶ Such contrition, while not perfect, is nevertheless a potential catalyst to bring us to the sacrament.
- ▶ Imperfect contrition does not have the power in and of itself to forgive serious sin.

Confession

- ▶ The sinner is called to examine his or her life before God.
- ▶ The sinner is exhorted to consider the areas and habits of sin in his or her life.
- ▶ The sinner is invited by God to enter into deep conversion and sorrow for sin.
- ▶ The sinner then is invited to name his or her sins.
- ▶ The sinner confesses them to God's minister who has been given the power to forgive sins by the Holy Spirit (RP: # 6b).
- ▶ Only God forgives sins; Jesus was given authority on earth to forgive sins, and he gave that authority to the apostles and exhorted them to exercise it.
- ▶ The authority to forgive sins in Jesus' name continues through the unbroken line of the apostles, through the ministers of the Church, the ordained priesthood.
- ▶ When sins are confessed, hearts are opened to God's minister who has taken a sacred oath not to reveal anything that is spoken when confession is made. What is said is between the confessor and the sinner is bound by the seal of confession. The priest may never divulge the content of sacramental confession. To break the seal of confession is to commit the gravest of sins.

Act of Penance

- ▶ Our response to God's incredible mercy is to perform an action that demonstrates our willingness to change, our commitment to avoid the same sins that we seem to commit over and over again: the habit of sin.
- ▶ When we sin, our actions harm our neighbor (CCC, 1459) and we must do what we can

- to restore the relationship and repair the harm.
- ▶ Sin harms our spiritual life. The act of penance is medicinal; it helps to heal our sin-sick soul. While we are forgiven through the sacramental sign of absolution, the disorder that causes sin is not automatically healed.
 - ▶ Serious sin harms our spiritual health. We make satisfaction or penance in order to strengthen us not to sin again. The act of penance strengthens us and helps restore us to spiritual health.
 - ▶ In the act of penance, the sinner affirms that Christ already made satisfaction for the sin of humanity by his sacrificial death on the cross. Sinners cooperate with the satisfaction already accomplished by making their own satisfaction.
 - ▶ Sinners promise not to sin again. The sinner affirms that his or her actions speak louder than words by performing an act of penance.
 - ▶ This act of penance may be accomplished in a variety of ways.
 - The priest might suggest that the penitent pray certain prayers, meditate on the cross of Christ, read sacred Scripture, or perform a spiritual or corporal work of mercy.
 - The priest might suggest that wrongs be righted and that harm done to another be rectified to the best of the sinner's ability.
 - ▶ The Rite of Penance insists that sinners live ongoing lives of penance when they serve their neighbor and patiently accept the joys, sorrows, and crosses of everyday life; when they read the Scriptures and help the poor; when they perform the disciplines of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.
 - ▶ In summary, penance is accomplished when the sinner makes satisfaction for sins committed, when he or she promises to amend his or her conduct, and make reparation for injury.
 - ▶ We can do nothing to earn God's forgiveness. It is freely given. However, we can show God that we are serious about our intention to change our lives. Satisfaction is the means by which we commit to amend our behavior.

Absolution

- ▶ God grants pardon to the sinner through the sacramental sign of absolution.
- ▶ Through the sacramental symbol of laying on of hands, the priest confers God's forgiveness. The Holy Spirit is invoked through the sacramental sign of extended hands and through that "epicletic" action (an epicletic action is an action that invokes the Holy Spirit), the sinner is forgiven.
- ▶ The transformative power of the Holy Spirit invites deep conversion of heart and strengthens the sinner to avoid sin in the future.
- ▶ Through absolution the sinner is not only reconciled with God, but also with the Church.
- ▶ In the story of the Prodigal Son, the father not only welcomed his son home and restored him to full stature; he also reconciled him with the community.
- ▶ Through sacramental absolution, the sinner is clothed with the reconciling robe of mercy and restored to full stature as a child of God and a member of the people of God.